

PEOPLE

Richard Nixon and the 'Lost Sex'

BY CHRISTOPHER SNOW HOPKINS

On February 9, 1969, President Nixon called on a female reporter in the third row of the media throng before him. It was his second press conference as president, and he had already parried questions about school desegregation, the Santa Barbara oil spill, and U.S. troop withdrawals in Southeast Asia. The reporter in question was Vera Glaser of the North American Newspaper Alliance.

"Mr. President," she began, "in staffing your administration, you have so far made about 200 high-level Cabinet and other policy-position appointments, and of these only three have gone to women. Could you tell us, sir, whether we can expect a more equitable recognition of women's abilities, or are we going to remain a lost sex?"

Some of the reporters in the room snickered, and the president "smiled and leaned back," as Glaser would later recall. But his answer was magnanimous and, in retrospect, progressive.

"Very seriously, I did not know that only three had gone to women," Nixon said. "And I shall see that we correct that imbalance very promptly."

Former Commerce Secretary **Barbara Hackman Franklin**, a trailblazer in her own right, cites this moment as an early intimation of Nixon's attitude toward what was then known as the "women's liberation movement." The episode touched off "a rather circuitous string of events," Franklin said. In 1971, acting on a recommendation by the White House Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities, Nixon hired Franklin to recruit women for high-level jobs in government.

Last month, Franklin was elected to the board of directors of the Richard Nixon Foundation, where she will endeavor to burnish the legacy of a president remembered not for advancing women's rights but for illicit machinations in the Oval Office. As president, Nixon "pulled the movement for women's equality right into the mainstream of American life," Franklin said. "He made it legitimate."

Nixon's impact on women's equality was not apparent to Franklin until several decades after the fact. Fifteen years ago, at the urging of a Penn State University archivist, Franklin launched an oral-history project "to capture the stories of the people who were there—mostly women but some men. We have 50 of them." A compilation of these accounts is to be published early



Trailblazer: Franklin with Nixon, and today (below).



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Barbara Hackman Franklin

ed, "I come from a small town in Lancaster County, Pa. My father was the superintendent of schools, and he was pretty farsighted, [especially] for the time. He was somebody who said, 'Do whatever you want to do. I'll help you if I can, but whatever it is, do it well.'"

She added: "When I was in my second year at Harvard Business School, another woman student and I [circulated] a questionnaire to test the attitudes of the men toward the women.... We found these attitudes [resembled] a bell curve: Some were anti, some were pro, and most didn't care."

She and her colleague also interviewed the female students, Franklin said. "We found that a strong majority were either the eldest child or the only child who had fathers who were influential," she said. "It was the 'son theory!' In other words, fathers were treating the eldest daughter as though she were a son." ■

next year.

Franklin's reputation and credentials will lend considerable weight to the enterprise. She was one of the first women to graduate from Harvard Business School; was an original member of the Consumer Product Safety Commission; is a four-term alumna of the President's Advisory Council on Trade Policy and Negotiations; and was the 29th Commerce secretary, serving under President George H.W. Bush. Today, she is president of Barbara Franklin Enterprises, an international consulting firm.

Asked about her determination to surmount gender barriers, Franklin respond-